

Blas Galindo, prolific composer

The Mexican composer Blas Galindo Dimas, internationally famous for his *Sones de mariachi* (Mariachi songs) (1940), died on April 19 at the age of 83.

Born the same year as the Mexican Revolution began, in San Gabriel (now Venustiano Carranza), Jalisco, Galindo took part in the Revolution during his adolescence. In 1928 he organized the village band.

The great musician Carlos Chávez commented on this stage of Galindo's life: "While he was with San Gabriel's little wind instrument band, Galindo learned to solve practical matters on his own and acquired the instrumental experience that was to serve as the basis for his technique."

At the age of twenty-one, he went to Mexico City and joined the National Conservatory. In 1933, at the age of 23, he produced his first work, *Suite for violin and cello*. The following year, he formed "The Group of Four" with Salvador Contreras, Daniel Anaya and José Pablo Moncayo, which met twice a month to criticize each other's work. In order to improve his technique, Galindo studied composition with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center in Lennox, Massachusetts.

Regarded as the last representative of "Mexican nationalism,"¹ Galindo produced compositions inspired not only by his country but also by literature. Some of the most important include *Mexican overture II*, *Cantata to Juárez*, *Song to Justo Sierra*, *The City of the Gods* (written for a sound and light show at the Teotihuacan pyramids), *The vow* (based on *The wen*, a short story by Juan Rulfo), *Homage to Rubén Darío*, *Homage to Juan Rulfo*, *Homage to Cervantes* and *Pablo Neruda's Poem XX*.

In addition to his symphonic works, Galindo's musical legacy includes works for orchestra, cantatas, pieces for band and voices, music for ballet, theater and cinema, chamber music, and works for piano and a *capella* choir.

¹ "As with all kinds of nationalism, Mexican nationalism began as a search for a musical identity. It developed in the 20's as an expression of social postulates and stylistic and aesthetic definitions that did not appear in European forms of nationalism." Yolanda Moreno Rivas, *Rostros del nacionalismo en la música mexicana* (Faces of nationalism in Mexican music). Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1989.

The composer Mario Lavista suggests that new generations of musicians should review and assess some of Galindo's lesser-known works, such as his preludes for piano, his songs and sonatas. According to the tenor José Guadalupe Reyes, Galindo's vocal music is superb; his works are well-loved by choral groups.

Carlos Chávez (1899-1978)

At the age of fifteen, Carlos Chávez wrote *Symphony for orchestra* and a few arrangements of Mexican music, including *La Adelita* and *La cucaracha*. He eventually wrote a total of 87 musical compositions.

Between 1926 and 1928, Chávez lived in New York. In July of 1928 he founded the Mexican Symphony Orchestra, which he conducted until 1949. During that time, he introduced the public to 255 pieces by composers from around the world and 82 Mexican works that had hitherto not been played in Mexico. He often allowed younger conductors to perform in his place, in addition to inviting many others from abroad.

From 1928 to 1935, Chávez was director of the National Conservatory of Music. From 1946 to 1952, he was director of the National Institute of Fine Arts, the establishment of which he had helped plan. He also served as guest conductor of the Lima, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Madrid, Vienna and Berlin symphony orchestras.

In 1959, Chávez held the Poetry Chair at Harvard, previously occupied by Stravinsky, Hindemith and Copland. He was visiting professor at the University of Buffalo and member of the National College. He wrote *Toward a new music* (New York, 1937) and *Musical thought* (Cambridge, 1961), which was later translated into Spanish.

Taken from the *Enciclopedia de México*.

Mario Lavista

Among contemporary composers, Mario Lavista is one of the most dedicated and authentic within the controversial world of Mexican music.

He was born in Mexico City in 1943; studied composition under Carlos Chávez and Héctor Quintanar and, at the National Conservatory of Music, under Rodolfo Halffter. Later he went to Paris, where he studied under Olivier Messiaen and Nadia Boulanger, and to Cologne, studying under the experimentalist Karl Heinz Stockhausen.

From 1970 to 1972 he was a member of Quanta, the musical improvisation group that gave microtonal music concerts, playing instruments created by Julián Carrillo. He was also invited, in 1972, to perform experimental works at Japan Radio-Television's Electronic Music Laboratory.

From 1974 to 1975 Mario Lavista was Chairman of the Music Department at Mexico's National University; in 1987 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Fernando Alvarez del Castillo
Sub-director of the Library of Mexico.

As a music student, Galindo showed a preference for the piano. However, in later life he preferred using musical instruments as a basis for his compositions to playing them himself, leading Carlos Chávez to remark rather wistfully, "The preludes have a feeling for piano that one would expect from a composer with a long experience of piano-playing. However, this is not the case with Galindo: he has had more experience on the instrumental and vocal side.

"In any case, this makes one regret the fact that circumstances did not further encourage the composer's development as a pianist. If Galindo managed to have such a great feeling for piano without being a pianist, what would it have been like if he had been a pianist?"

However, his most famous piece was *Sones de mariachi*, a combination of *La negra*, *El zopilote* and *Los cuatro reales*, composed for flute, violins and mariachi ensemble. Its first performance at the "Twenty centuries of Mexican art" exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art was so successful that it was immediately recorded by Columbia Records and distributed worldwide.

Pianist, teacher, conductor, director of the National Conservatory of Music and founder of the magazine *Nuestra música* (Our music), Galindo devoted his life to composing, as can be seen by the vast collection of

works he left: 156 published works and some 60 unpublished pieces.

Blas Galindo always used to say he was "doing a bit of music." He would get up at seven, walk for an hour and begin the task of creating music, to which he devoted some eight to ten hours every day, even on weekends. He had intended not to leave any unfinished work, but at his death, five of his projects were still incomplete.

Galindo's discipline and dedication were rewarded by numerous tributes, awards and prizes. To mention just a few, he received the Order of Knight Commander of Poland, the National Prize for Science and Arts, First Prize in Composition in Caracas, Venezuela, for his composition, *Symphony No. 2*, and the Gabriela Mistral prize from the Organization of American States. He was a founding member of the Arts Academy and vice-chairman of the Society of Authors and Composers.

A book on the life and works of Blas Galindo is shortly to be published by the National Center for Musical Research, Documentation and Information, as part of its series "Great Masters of Mexican Music." ❧

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